

SECTION 14: LEAVING ALASKA

Sunday, August 5, 2008

Ketchikan, Alaska, to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada
Route 102 88.03 miles

The alarm goes off at 3 a.m. Alaska time (4 a.m. U.S. and Canadian Pacific Daylight time). It is very dark out, so we ignore the chime for half an hour, then get up. By the time we cast off, at 4:20, it is getting light. A weather front is forecast for tomorrow, so we are hoping to get to Prince Rupert before it gets to us.

At 8:10 we are abeam Foggy Bay, where we stopped when we came north, with flat, glassy seas and some ocean swells. By the time we pass Cape Fox, at 9:27, and enter exposed Dixon Entrance, the sun is out and the sky blue. Seas are still glassy and the swell actually a bit flatter. Alaska is giving us a pleasant send-off.

To get from Alaska to Prince Rupert (the first place one can clear customs and legally enter Canada), you must cross Dixon Entrance. The name “Entrance” implies a narrow opening or channel but in fact it is a large, open body of water, “exposed to the full effect of the open Pacific,” as described by Margo Wood, author of “Charlie’s Charts North to Alaska,” one of the bibles of Alaskan cruising. Dixon Entrance hazards can include fog, swells and complex currents. Fortunately, we have none of these today.

At 9:55 we cross the imaginary dotted line that divides U.S. and Canadian waters, welcomed by glassy seas and the Kirsten H, a tug headed north while towing a large barge with a huge load of containers.



We are now in Canada, and look forward to seeing the red roofs and white buildings that distinguish Canadian lighthouses. Green Island will be the first. We reach it at 11:05 and are now in the shelter of Dundas Island, the largest of several islands which provide some protection from Dixon Entrance's westerly winds and ocean swells.

We came to Alaska hoping to see wildlife and glaciers calving. We've seen some of that. But what we treasure – and did not plan on – was the opportunity to meet people, hear their stories and better understand the Southeastern Alaska way of life, its rhythms and challenges. Fishing has been poor, we've seen just a few eagles and fewer bears, and the glaciers held on to their icy walls -- but our people experiences have been amazing. Exploring the gravel roads or wooden boardwalks in small towns (just villages, really), talking to fishermen on their boats berthed next to ours, sharing stories with other cruisers, through these and many other experiences, we have collected memories that we will cherish and relive. We caught (and ate) more Dungeness crabs than ever imagined, and have seen more rain than we knew existed.

But at the end Alaska gave us a beautiful farewell “dessert” of sunshine and mild weather. How could we not want to come back?

